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## THE COSTUME OF ENGLISH WOMEN

FROM THE HEPTARCHY TO THE PRESENT DAY.

BY WALTER THORNBURY.

## CHAPTER IV.



HE female dress of the reign of James I. very much resembled that of Elizabeth, but if anything, the farthingale was more exuberant and extravagant. Bulwer, in his "Pedigree of the English Gallant," tells a story of a "vardingale," which shows what astonishment they produced in countries where they were seldom seen.

When James I. sent Sir Peter Wyat as his ambassador to the Grand Seignior at Constantinople, the sultanness expressed a great desire to see Lady Wyat. A state visit was accordingly paid, Lady Wyat and all her gentlewomen being dressed in their great and redundant vardingales. The sultanness received them most politely, but could not conceal her surprise at the deformity of English ladies, and Lady Wyat was at last obliged to explain the whole mystery of the absurd dress. And here it may be remarked, that with all their vices and follies, Eastern women have always preserved a simple and pure ideal of dress, and have never wandered into the follies and distortions of the European ladies who despise them.

The ruffs and bands of ladies in this corrupt reign were generally stiffened with yellow starch, which, however, went out of fashion when Mrs. Anne Turner, a milliner of Paternoster Row, was hung at Tyburn in a yellow ruff for her complicity with the wicked Countess of Somerset in the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury. In the old play called *Lingua, or the Combat of the Tongue and the Five Senses for Superiority*, c. 1607, the vanities of this age of Shakspeare's women is loudly rated. The author says that he set a dozen maids to attire a boy (boys acted all female parts at this time), and there was much to do with their looking-glasses, painting of blue veins and red cheeks, pinning and unpinning, setting and unsetting, forming and unforming. "Such a stir," says the indignant writer, "with combs, cascanets, dressing purls, fall squares, busks, bodices, scarfs, necklaces, carcanets, sabatoes, borders, tires, fans, palisadoes, puffs, ruffs, cuffs, muffs, pushes, partlets, friglets, bandlets, corslets, pendulets, armlets, annulets, bracelets . . . . and now there is such calling for fardingales, kirtles, busk points, shoe ties, and the like, that seven pedlar's shops, nay, all Stourbridge Fair, will scarcely furnish her. A ship is sooner rigged by far than a gentlewoman made ready."

The ladies' ruffs in James I.'s time, though generally yellow, were often coloured with white, red, blue, purple, and "goose green" (Ben Jonson) starch. A print of the time, representing those great leaders of society, the Earl and Countess of Somerset, is given by Fairholt and Wright, and shows the fullest dress of this period extremely minutely. The proud syren—so beautiful and so wicked—wears a Mary Stuart lace cap, low on the forehead and arched at the sides; she has two necklaces; her large-pattern ruff stands up stiffened round her neck. The countess's waist is very tight, and her farthingale very enormous. A jewel from her cap hangs over her forehead. Her dress has long pendant sleeves outside the tight inner ones, and she wears lace cuffs. Well might witty Heywood, in his interlude of the *Four P's*, say—

"Forsooth women have many lets,  
And they be masked in many nets,  
As frontlets, fillets, partlets, and bracelets,  
And then their bonnets and their poyntettes;  
By these lets and nets the let (hindrance) is such,  
That speed is small when haste is much."

A kneeling figure, from a tomb in Swarkestone Church, Derbyshire, is selected by Mr. Fairholt as an excellent specimen of the ordinary young English country lady in this reign—the bride

or the Rosalind of the period. The date is 1622. The lady wears a tight bodice with a long pointed waist, a small plain ruff, and wide sleeves, with pendant ones attached. Her hair is combed into a roll over her forehead, and she wears a small hood, or coif, turned over the head. These frontlets ceased to be worn soon after this date.

For the dress of the highest rank we must turn to Anne of Denmark. There is a portrait of her in one of the bedrooms of Hampton Court. She is a dark-eyed girl in a white dress, with strange head-dress, shoulder ruff, and immense French farthingale. In Le Pollet, near Dieppe, there is another picture of Anne. The dress is slashed in the Spanish style, and ornamented with knots of yellow ribbon. This picture, which came from the castle of Arques, was one sent to Henry IV. of France. At the coronation of this queen she wore a robe of purple velvet lined with white Spanish taffeta and covered with gold.

Several portraits of Anne of Denmark by Van Somers, her favourite artist, still exist at Hampton Court. In one of these



Elizabeth Woodville.

she is dressed for hunting (a sport to which her awkward husband was prone), in a monstrous farthingale of dark green velvet, made with a long, tight-waisted bodice, an odd shovel hat of grey beaver, banded with gold and adorned with crimson plumes. Her hair is piled up and elaborately curled and frizzed. She rides a quiet punchy sorrel steed, with a long cream-coloured mane. The corsage of the queen's gown is cut very low, but the bosom is covered with a transparent chemisette and a Brussels lace collar. On her hands are buff leather gloves, with gauntlet tops edged with deep lace. Her dogs, dwarf greyhounds, wear ornamented collars, with her initials embossed in gold. She holds two of them by a long crimson leash. Her negro groom leads her fat hunter, which is accoutred with a high-pommelled side-saddle covered with crimson velvet, and her rich red housings are fringed with gold. This queen usually wore a velvet mask when riding in public, and took it off occasionally when the people cheered. Mary de Medicis on one occasion sent Queen Anne a box of artificial flowers, and the

Queen of Spain on another a gown of murrey-coloured satin, ornamented with gilt cut leather.

With Henrietta Maria much of the old English fashion passed away, especially the abominable farthingale and slashed sleeves. This beautiful woman, at her nominal marriage in Nôtre Dame



*Countess of Surrey, after Holbein.*

with Charles's representative, wore a bridal robe of cloth of gold and silver, passemented with the lilies of France, and enriched with diamonds and other jewels. A portrait of her, in the Vandyke Room at Windsor Castle, represents her in a white satin dress, with high tight bodice, and a large falling collar trimmed with point-lace. The bodice is closed in the front with bows of cherry-coloured ribbons, and is finished from the waist with richly-embroidered tabs. The very full sleeves descend to the elbows, where they are confined by ruffles. On one arm is a narrow black bracelet; on the other are costly gems. She wears a string of pear-shaped pearls round her neck, and a red ribbon twisted among her chestnut hair on the back of her head.

In another of Vandyke's court-pictures Queen Henrietta is introduced with her royal husband and her two eldest sons, Charles and James. The Queen wears a dress of rich brown brocade, with very full lace ruffles, and her small cape falls over the bodice, which is finished round the bosom and the waist with a purple band.

During the Civil War, when Henrietta, playing an Amazonian part, which recalled her descent from Henry IV., quitted Sir William Strickland's seat, Boynton Hall, near Burlington, where she had been staying, much to the vexation of that Parliamentary general, her Majesty took with her "as a loan" all the family plate, and left as a pledge of return a beautiful portrait of herself. The artist has painted her in a plain white gown, with open sleeves, drawn up with broad green ribbons. The bodice is laced across the stomacher with gold chains, and ornamented with rows of pendant pearls. Her hair behind is adorned with flowers, and is arranged in short, thick, frizzled curls, according to the fashion called at the French Court, *tête de mouton*.

Hollar, in his "Ornatus Muliebris Anglicanus" (1645), gives a very graceful figure of the young English gentlewoman of Charles I.'s time. Her hair is combed over her forehead, and gathered in close rolls behind, while at the sides (as in Molière's character) it flows down in ringlets—a beautiful fashion, when the hair is abundant. Hollar's lady has a long pointed bodice laced tight in front. Her white satin petticoat flows to the ground, and her dark grey gown is gathered up to the waist. Her sleeves are wide and short, with deep white lawn cuffs turned back to the elbow, and she wears long white leather gloves, and carries a fan. Her collar is white and plain.

The violent Prynne, in his "Tyrants and Protectors set forth in their colours" (1654), refers bitterly to the vanity and display of

the ladies of the bygone Court: "Their painting and patching, their caps and feathers, the cocking of their beavers, their stilettoes, their man-like apparel, their slashed sleeves, their jetting, their strutting, their leg making (bowing), with the rest of their antique apparel and postures."

Mr. Fairholt, in the second edition of his admirable book on English costume, points out with excellent discrimination the great fluctuations in dress in this reign, between 1631 and 1641. The first figure (an old lady) he gives is from Westminster Abbey. The effigy has a round ruff, a gown open down the front, and ornamented the whole length with a row of buttons and clasps; "the ridged sleeve is of great size, and tied to the elbow. She has a close French hood, from which descends over her back a long coverchief, pinned up on each shoulder.

The second figure, the young wife of a knight, Dorothy Strutt, in Whalley Church, Essex, is dressed with extreme plainness, and was probably a Puritan. She also wears a long coverchief, but her hair falls loose on her shoulders; she has no ruff. Her bosom is covered with a kerchief. She wears an apron with a slight border. The sleeves of the gown are full at the shoulder and tight at the wrist, and finish with a lace cuff.

About 1630 the dress grew more French and extravagant. The men took to ribboned lovelocks, bunches of ribbons, and lace fringes to their boots; while the ladies studded their foolish faces with black patches of all shapes—lozenges, stars, circles, and crescents, to heighten their complexion, and in some cases, by very daring leaders of fashion, black coaches, with four black horses, were stuck on their foreheads, which drove a Puritan writer to say that the spots were plague spots, and the horses were harnessed ready to whirl the wearers to Acheron.

The countrywomen in the early part of the troublous reign of Charles I. still retained the high-crowned hat, the wheel ruff, and the plain French hood, the muffler and the clumsy vardingale of the previous reign, buff gowns and green aprons. The ladies had also taken to French ways of dressing the hair, and the graceful falling collar edged with lace.

During Cromwell's rule female dress became very plain, and saintly vanity abstained from all colour and ornament; shoes grew pointed, the broad-brimmed hat, the kerchief, and the



*Anna Boleyn.*

simple gown with plain cuffs were universally worn as a mark of party. The bosom strictly covered from the lover's eye by stiff kerchiefs and capes, plain aprons, and coverchiefs that tied under the chin, were the inexorable fashion of Grace and Ruth. An effigy from a Sacheverell tomb in Morley Church, Derbyshire.

given by Mr. Fairholt, shows us the severest austerity of dress in 1657: a plain cape tied with two bows, wide sleeves and cuffs, and a plain dress with one over it opening from the waist.

Catharine of Braganza, whom we respect because she introduced tea-drinking into England, adopted the graceful French



*Servant of the time of Henry VIII., after Holbein.*

fashions which ruled among the courtesans of that heartless and shameless profligate her husband. The portrait of this ill-used lady, by Lely, at Hampton Court, shows the dress so familiar to us on the French stage. In a portrait of this queen, formerly in the Strawberry Hill collection, she appears as a glowing brunette, with large dark eyes and profuse chestnut curls, her hair descends on each side of her face in a wavy pyramid, while one large topknot is combed slanting across her forehead. This was supposed to be the original picture sent to Charles II. when Spain had offended him by its arrogance. Catharine arrived in England dressed in the English costume, white cloth trimmed with silver lace. A bridal portrait of this unhappy queen is in the historical gallery at Versailles—her rich ringlets fall from a simple knot; she is dressed in black velvet and point-lace, the sleeves are full, and looped up with black ribbons, to show the delicate ruffled cambric sleeves of her chemise; she has black velvet bracelets clasped with pearls, and holds a bunch of orange blossoms in her hand.

Pepys, the all-observant gossip of court and city, describes seeing the queen riding with her husband hand-in-hand in the park. She looked "mighty pretty" in a white-laced waistcoat and a short crimson petticoat—hair *négligé*. Lady Castlemaine that day wore a yellow plume, and Mrs. Stuart (afterwards Duchess of Richmond) a hat cocked and a red plume.

Catharine, on her arrival, used the large green Portuguese fan, but she afterwards adopted the smaller and lighter fan of India. In the latter part of the reign English ladies began to wear periwigs. The queen having small feet tried, but in vain, to introduce short dresses.

The paintings of Lely show us the Charles the Second dress to perfection: the dress was as loose and careless as the morals of the ladies who wore it. A figure on the needleworked frame of a looking-glass, supposed to have once belonged to that pretty wanton, Nell Gwynne, shows a lady in blue petticoat and red gown, the sleeves turned up with white and fastened with a bow; she wears a plain collar, and has pink bows in her hair. About 1670, false curls, set on wires, were worn at the side of the head. In the most graceful of Lely's portraits the ladies wear only a rose, a string of pearls, or a bow of ribbon on the head; towards the end of the reign hoods became fashionable, and

Pepys crows on the Whitsunday upon which his handsome and buxom wife dons her new yellow birdseye hood at church.

A curious tailor's bill for a man's suit, made for the Duchess of Portsmouth (quoted by Mr. Fairholt) for a Whitehall masque in 1672, shows that she wore a dove-coloured silk and brocade coat with scarlet buttons, and a black beaver hat trimmed with scarlet and silver.

The reign of James II. was too short to modify English dress to any great extent, but William and Mary brought in Dutch fashions, and no more reserve and modesty than was wanted. The herb strewers at the coronation wore hoods, deep-pointed bodices, with open robes looped back to show rich petticoats. They had long gloves with very deep ruffles, that fell from the elbow nearly to the wrist.

William of Orange brought in larger periwigs, and now with his wife, Mary, came in the commode or high head-dress, which the French called the Fontanges, the name of the beauty who introduced it into Louis XIV.'s court. The commode was a pyramid of lace sometimes three storeys high. It was sometimes a mere fan of lace arching over the forehead, with the hair arranged in short close curls at the side; a hood was fastened to the top of the hair and thence spread over the shoulder. Stiff formal stays of a V-shape pinched in the body, the gowns streamed out behind, and in front opened to show the little apron deeply fringed with lace, and the rich petticoat. Bows of ribbon studded the sides of some of the commodes, as we see in the best portraits of Queen Mary, and lace falls from it passed over the shoulders. When she landed in England she wore an orange cloak, and dressed her hair with lofty cornettes of orange ribbon and aigraffes of pearls. Her robe was purple velvet, and her petticoat orange, and orange banners were borne before her.

A portrait of Queen Mary, 1688, represents her with an extraordinary head-dress. It is a cornette of three tiers made of guipure points piled on the top of the hair, which is combed up in a sort of haycock; below the lace are curls. Broad and full lace lappets, which surround her cheeks, and fall as low as her elbows, are ornamented with bows of striped ribbon. These lappets were, it is supposed, used to shade the sun from her face. Her brocade robe is stiff-bodied, and very high; her sleeves are narrow at the shoulders, where they fasten with bows of ribbon; the sleeves widen as they descend, and turn up with cuffs from the elbows to show the sleeves of the chemise, which



*Mary Stuart : from the Morton Portrait.*

have rich ruffles of guipure points meeting stiff long gloves of leather. The bosom is shaded by the chemise, and the tucker heavily trimmed with guipure. A magnificent cluster of diamonds adorns her chest, and round her throat is a necklace of enormous pearls. This seems to have been her state dress.

It is said that Queen Mary wished to restrict the use of the *cornette* and the *Fontanges* to the higher class, and to introduce for the lower rank the high-crowned hat of the Dutch women of that day, but no such edict was ever passed, nor would it probably have been obeyed. The wax effigy of Queen Mary at Westminster Abbey, as described by Miss Strickland, is clothed in purple velvet. The bodice is formed with a triangular stomacher of white miniver, which is studded with three oval clusters of diamonds; the under dress is of shaded lutestring, the groundwork white, but enriched with shades and brocadings of every possible colour. The bosom is surrounded with guipure, and large double ruffles of parchment lace depend from the straight sleeves towards the hands. The purple velvet skirt is trimmed with bands of broad gold lace finely worked. The throat necklace is à la Sévigné, and the ear-rings are large pear pearls.

Ladies of rank in Queen Anne's time sometimes wore a gay male dress, and a portrait at Ham House, of a Countess of Dysart, represents her in a small, three-cornered cocked hat bound with gold lace, the point stuck full in front over a long white powdered flowing wig, a Mechlin cravat like a man, a long white coat, a flapped waistcoat, and a habit petticoat.

Queen Anne liked quiet dress, and the costume of her time was precise and formal. She was strict in enforcing a proper decorum in the dress of her household, and would complain of a slovenly periwig or too bright a lining for a coat. She was very indignant once when Lord Bolingbroke, sent for in haste, came in a *Ramilies*, or tie wig, instead of a full bottom.

"I suppose," she exclaimed petulantly, "his lordship will come to court the next time in his nightcap."

The ladies of Queen Anne's time wore low ribboned coiffures with falling lappets; the bodice was stiff, and laced down the front; small laced aprons were placed over flounced petticoats, to display which the gown was gathered in folds behind. Country girls wore low caps, with the frill turned up over the forehead to imitate a commode; the short and loose-sleeved gown was tucked up round the waist and fastened behind, and the apron reached to the ground. Long-quartered, high-heeled shoes completed the modest and dull dress.

The allusions to dress in the *Spectator* carry the reader, as Mr. Fairholt justly observes, completely through the reign of Anne. There are satirical allusions to little muffs and silver garters. Swift alludes to the Babel head-dress, which made the Duchess of Grafton resemble a madwoman. D'Urfey writes of water camlet gowns, gowns with golden flowers, spotted petticoats fringed with knotted thread, lace shoes and silk hose. Clothes were still often perfumed. Sir Roger de Coverley, in 1711, mentions the hoop petticoat as reviving; hoods of various colours were worn at the Opera; and in 1712 cherry colour was the prevailing fashion. Fashionable belles favoured scarlet stockings, and in many cases took snuff. Black silk mantuas were fashionable, and riding suits of blue camlet trimmed with silver. Malcolm, in his anecdotes, gives an advertisement of losses, which convey an odd notion of female dress in this reign. There are cherry-coloured stays trimmed with blue and silver; a red and dove-coloured damask gown; a yellow satin apron, trimmed with white Persian silk; a black silk petticoat, with a red and white calico border; a black silk furbelowed scarf, &c.

Dress grew simple in the reign of George I., and there being no queen few changes took place. The low coiffures with falling lappets, the stiff bodices, the small laced aprons, still continued, and people dressed pretty well as they liked. In 1732 the *London* describes the following ladies at a party. One wore a *robe de chambre*; the next a close habit resembling a *weed*. A widow in her first year had on a sarsnet hood and a loose round gown. On her left sat a widow in a riding-hood, and another in a short cloak and apron. Next her was a pretty young creature in a hat such as old women wear in the north, while this lady's companion had on a velvet cap, with a black flap let down to her shoulders like a Newcastle carrier. "Before we broke up," says the writer, "there arrived two ladies in a hack, who had just been airing; the first had her hair tucked up under a laced beaver and feather, and the second had an upright plume, with her hair dangling to her waist; and in

short, the several head-dresses, with the peaks, lappets, and roundings, and the several habits, with the sleeves, robings, lacings, embroideries, and other ornaments, were so various in the cut and shape, that my niece (a country girl) imagined that she was in an assembly of the wives and daughters of the foreign ministers then resident in town, and when their language undeceived her, as readily concluded her aunt had appointed a solemn masquerade, with a general reception to all visitors."

In this reign, thanks to the growth of sentiment and absurd sham pastoral poetry, the ladies began to affect extreme simplicity of dress. They tried to look like milkmaids, and wore high-crowned hats and long aprons, or low straw hats lined with green, and with broad brims. In 1739 old ladies wore plain silk gowns with double borders, black hoods and scarfs, with tassels at the end. The younger had laced stomachers and fringed white aprons.

In 1744 (George II.) young and fashionable ladies dressed in the same airy milkmaid manner, with small round hats, plain gowns opened low in front, long white muslin aprons, and an improved sort of hoop. The satirists were outrageous against the hoop, and there are frequent drawings of its absurd exaggerations in Hogarth's works. About 1740 a pretty novelty was introduced from France, the *sacque*, a gown which hung free of the body from the shoulders to the train, and was most graceful and changeable in its folds. The wide loose gown was open in front. The hair was now trimmed in curls close round the face, one or two falling behind, and the cap worn was the Mary Stuart shape.

The train of the *sacque* in walking was thrown on the arm, or tossed negligently over the hoop. Those two clever artists of the present day, Messrs. Leslie and Storey, have shown the grace of the *sacque* in many of their charming pictures.

About 1752 (George II.) the capuchin, or black silk hood, was introduced from France, and was not ungraceful. A satire of the time shows us what a strange medley of dress prevailed during Hogarth's career. The writer rails at the small bugle caps adorned with a pompoon; the grey powder on the hair braided like the tail of a colt for sale; the stomacher bits ornamented with silver and ribbon; the naked neck and shoulders surrounded by lace; the *sacques* blue, yellow, and green, and the sixteen ruffles on the elbow, the flounced lawn aprons, hoops eight yards wide, high-heeled shoes ornamented with gold lace.

In drawings of this time the close upturned hair of the ladies gives an air of meanness to the heads when compared with the outrageous swelling hoops. The small black hoods were frequently worn with short fringed capes. Chip hats now became fashionable. The beautiful Miss Gummings adopted them, and a rival of these ladies used to declare "that she wanted nothing but an elegant chip hat, with a large rose on the left side, and tied under the chin with cherry-coloured ribbons, to make her appear as charming as either of the lovely sisters." Ladies wore political colours, and white roses denoted an adherent of the Stuarts.

The dress of the early years of George III.'s reign was very simple. The Court with the young King and Queen set a good example. The most fashionable ladies thought it good taste to wear a small gipsy hat, a long-waisted gown laced over the stomacher, short sleeves, and the elbow with very full ruffles. This formed the costume. But for the rich tradeswomen, or vulgar persons, there were plenty of gaudy colours. We hear of brocaded lutestring *sacques*, with ruby-coloured ground and stripes; black satin *sacques*, with red and white flowers, trimmed with white floss, garnet-coloured lutestring, night-gowns with stripes of green and white, trimmed with floss of the same colour, and lined with straw-coloured lutestring.

In 1767 the hair was displayed in head-dresses of enormous size. Just before this it was fashionable to bind the hair tight and trim. "Now," says a satirist of the period, "our fine ladies remind me of an apple stuck on the point of a small skewer." Wool was used to create an appearance of abundant locks, great quantities of pomatum were employed to plaster them down, and grey was the fashionable colour for powder, as one can see by Reynolds's portraits.